

## **Clothes Dryers -- A Fire Hazard to Know About**

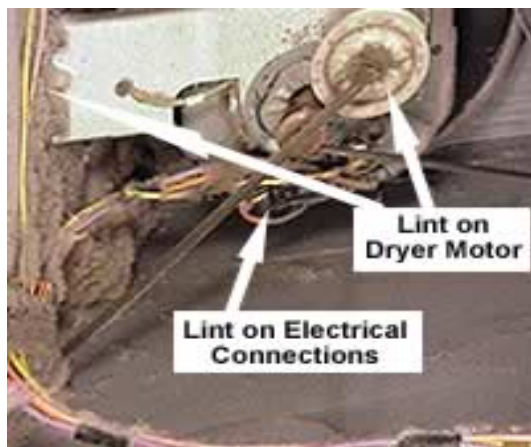
### **Clothes Dryers Fire Statistics**

In 1997, according to the United States Consumer Products Safety Commission, there were 16,800 residential fires reported and responded to by fire departments where the source of the fire was the clothes dryer or vent. These fires caused \$97.3 million in damage, 430 civilian injuries, and 30 civilian deaths.<sup>1</sup>

### **What Causes Clothes Dryer Fires?**

Clothes dryers must vent hot air from the dryer to the outside of the house. Lint becomes detached from the clothes and is carried out through the exhaust. If lint builds up in the exhaust pipe or inside the dryer, it slows the air movement through the dryer.

This causes more lint to collect on the backside of the dryer drum, on the dryer motor, or on the electrical connections inside the dryer, placing the highly combustible lint on top of and adjacent to heat sources inside the dryer.



**Keeping the exhaust pipe clear of lint keeps the airflow moving efficiently and reduces the amount of lint collecting inside the dryer, thus reducing the chances of fire.**

### **What Can a Homeowner Do?**

Using the right type of exhaust pipe is the first step in reducing lint buildup. Some vents are made of plastic-coated flexible wire. The 4" diameter white-plastic or aluminum-foil exhaust duct typically used to exhaust the heated air from clothes dryers can create a dangerous fire hazard if not inspected regularly and kept clean of lint. The ribbed surface inside can slow the air movement and catch lint.



A better solution is using sheet metal vent pipes. They are more fire resistant and can help contain a fire should one start. Another advantage of sheet metal vent pipes is the rigid metal cannot be smashed in between the wall and the dryer as easily as plastic vents.

To facilitate airflow the exhaust pipe should be as short as possible and have a limited number of bends. When designing your home or locating the clothes dryer, place it near an outside wall. Also use pop rivets, and not screws, to connect metal vent pipe pieces. The pop rivets do not collect as much lint as the threaded ends of screws inside the vent pipe.

And finally, properly maintain the dryer by cleaning the lint out of the exhaust pipe and the exhaust of the dryer once a year. Not only will you be reducing the chances of a dryer fire, but this should result in faster drying times and energy savings also.

### **Safety Tips**

- If clothing is still damp at the end of a normal cycle or requires longer dryer times, this may be a sign that the exhaust or lint screen is blocked.
- **Stay home while the dryer is in use!**  
Turn off the dryer before leaving the house.
- **Clean the filter screen after each load.**  
This will keep the vent clear. When accumulated lint clogs the vent, the dryer can overheat and a fire could result.
- Do not operate the dryer without a lint filter.
- Remove accumulated lint from around the drum.
- Make sure that the dryer is plugged into an outlet suitable for its electrical needs as overloaded electrical outlets can result in blown fuses or tripped circuit breakers.
- Never put clothes in the dryer that had kerosene, oil or gasoline on them. These should be washed until there is no smell left and then air dried.

- Keep the dryer area clear of combustibles (i.e., boxes or clothing).
- Dryers should be installed and serviced by a professional.
- Have gas-powered dryers inspected by a professional regularly to ensure that the gas line and connection are intact.

**Washing machine fires** though rare can be caused by lint from the dryers on the motors catching fire, Overheated motors, frayed or bad electrical connections.